THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) to (e) India has close and friendly relations with the people of Iraq. The holding of elections in Iraq in January 30, 2005 is a noteworthy development that would hopefully set in motion a process that would lead to the Iraqi people taking full control of their destiny. India will continue to interact with new Government in Iraq. India stands for the right of the Iraqi people to freely determine their political future.

List of Indian prisoners released by Pakistan

349. SHRI LALIT SURI: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Pakistan Government has recently released a list of over 180 Indians in its jails;

(b) if so, the steps being taken by the Indian Government to secure their release and by when they are expected to be repatriated;

(c) what according to the Indian Government's information and estimation is the number of Indians at present languishing in Pak jails; and

(d) what specific efforts are being made to secure the release of all of them?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) Pakistani media on February 2, 2005, reported that the Pakistan Government has prepared a list of 182 Indian prisoners in Pakistani jails.

(b) Government has taken up the matter with the Government of Pakistan for confirmation and for early grant of consular access as well as release and repatriation.

(c) As per available information, approximately 900 civilian prisoners, over 650 fishermen and 54 POWs are believed to be in custody in Pakistan.

(d) Government, through diplomatic channels, has been consistently taking up the matter with Pakistan including at the highest level. During the Foreign Secretary level talks held at Islamabad on December 27-28, 2004 it was decided to grant consular access to all the prisoners held in

each other's country within three months from the date of their arrest and that repatriation would be done immediately after completion of sentence and nationality verification.

Following the visit, Pakistan had provided consular access to approximately 100 civilian prisoners and 650 fishermen in January and February 2005. The process of release and repatriation would follow confirmation of nationality and completion of sentence.

Government, through diplomatic channels, have also been consistently taking up the issue of early release of Indian POWs believed to be in Pakistan. The matter was also taken up during the meeting between Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh and the Prime Minister of Pakistan on November 24, 2004 and also during the Foreign Secretary level talks on December 27-28, 2004.

Relaxation in visa norms for Pakistani senior citizens

350. SHRI RAJKUMAR DHOOT: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Government have relaxed visa norms for senior citizens of Pakistan;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether Pakistan has also reciprocated by relaxing its norms for Indian senior citizens;

(d) if so, the details thereof; and

(e) if not, the reasons advocated for the same?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) and (b) Subsequent to the April, 2003 normalization process, India, on 22 October, 2003, *inter alia,* permitted senior citizens (above 65) to cross at Wagah on foot. In order to give greater impetus to people-to-people contact and to generate further goodwill between the two countries, the government on September 18, 2004,